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A Sight Nobody Wants to See

Samantha Hartman

A faint smile she wears as she lays in the hospital bed absorbing all of the information as the doctors take us through the protocols that must be enforced before being lead to surgery. Mind boggled as I listen to all of the outcomes of such an intricate and lengthy procedure, fearing for my mother's life. Circular, sticky foam pads distributed all around her head as if she were some sort of alien. Hospital gown and socks on. Tags around her wrists identifying who she is along with her blood type in case of emergency. Monitors, an IV, and so much more to take in just sitting in what feels like a tiny hospital room that continues to get smaller and smaller. So many doctors entering and exiting to introduce themselves in what is already a compact room of my dad, mom, two sisters, and me.

Beyond everything that is going on, the one thing that gets me through it, is that faint, but radiant smile on my mom's face. From never having any prior health issues to having to go through an eight to ten hour procedure and intense recovery in order to remove none other than a brain tumor. My mother's strength beamed throughout the room that especially struck me. Under all of the hospital clothes and surgical items that attempted to take my mom away from me, she did not allow it. All I could vibrantly see was my loving, caring, beautiful, devoted, hard- working, strong, and inspiring mother. Nothing makes me prouder than the fact that she is my mom. Her strength is what got each of us through her surgery and allowed for her to have such an astonishing recovery. Every day it is her strength that I see shine throughout and inspires me.

The perfect view from the window of my mom's recovery room. Lake Michigan was sparkling as the sun reflected off of it. It did not take long for darkness to transpire. My dad, sisters, and I were brought to this room and told to wait for my mom because she would soon be arriving from surgery. I left to go to the bathroom before her arrival, but as I walked back to the room two nurses were pushing her on her bed into the room. I was the first to see her since her bed was facing me outside of the room. My sisters immediately looked at my face to see my reaction. Nothing could stop my tear drops from trickling down my face. Pale as a ghost. Still as a statue. She was not making a sound. Based on my reaction my sister asked the nurse if

my mom was responsive. The nurses were very affirmative saying how much my mom had actually been talking. Then came the moans of a zombie as if my mom were coming back from the dead. My sister says to her, “Hi mom, it’s the girls, we are here with you now.” Abruptly my mom’s eyes sprung open and locked onto mine. She responded back with a “hi girls” and immediately following was the never-ending thrill of puke fest. I dashed out of the room as I heard the shouts and cries of my mom.

Seeing my mom for the first time felt as if it was not actually my mom I was looking at. It was as if she was transparent and I was just looking right through a pale, empty, motionless figure. I was told that when she came out of surgery she might be unable to talk or she’d remain asleep for an unknown period of time. Her head could be wrapped up like a mummy. Her face might be distorted because of the nerves they were working so close to in order to remove the tumor. So many thoughts, so many options were rushing through my brain when I first glimpsed at her. The wave of emotions that crashed over me may have been fear and sorrow, but at the same time, joy. As traumatizing as it was to see my mom in these conditions, I knew how much worse it could have been. I may have left the room due to the sounds exerting my mom, but the main reason was so my mom would not see me as the mess I was. I could not let my mom get confused by my emotions that were already confusing me. I was not crying because I thought she was not doing well, it was because she was doing even better than I imagined. I was slapped across the face seeing my mom in such excruciating pain, but again I saw her strength. The strength my mom boasted to be in the condition she was already in, just a few hours out of surgery, was astonishing. I knew I could not do anything to weaken her strength which is my I would fight back the tears or leave the room before she could see my emotions. Nobody wants to see or hear their mom in pain, especially not post brain surgery. But there was nothing I wanted more than to be by my mom’s bedside every step of the way. What was already a long day, just became even longer.

Nighttime fell fast and visiting hours came to an end. My dad was supposed to be the only one staying overnight, but I was elected the lucky winner to also spend the night at the hospital. My mom lay there in her bed moving in all directions attempting to find any position comfortable for her head. My dad and I stand next to her bedside as he says to her “Alexis and Maddie are gone but Sammie is staying the night with me to help look after you.” My mom’s eyes crack open and look right into my eyes as she says, “hi punk” and I instantly felt the rush of warmth run through my body. I took the first shift so that my dad could get some rest. It was a never-ending thrill of a night. I stood next to my mom’s bed holding an ice pack over her head while holding onto her hand. I would run my fingers over her arm to give her comfort and so she knew I was there. My eyes were drooping, I could hardly keep them open, but it was the slightest squeeze of the hand from my mom

that kept me awake. Between running to the nurse station in the hallway to find the nurse, to scurrying to grab the puke bucket, to raising my mom's bed up, to waking up my dad, there was so much going on.

I could go on and on explaining what I saw and everything that I had to do that night and the next six days in the hospital but trust me nobody really wants to know. Just as I wish I never had to experience everything we encountered. But it was from the moment I first saw my mom after surgery that I knew I never wanted to leave her side. The worst part of it all were the flashbacks I was having from being at my grandma's bedside when she faintly squeezed my hand to acknowledge that she knew I was there before her passing.

I walk through the door and I immediately notice all that is not right. The guest bed from the basement is in the front living room. There is a walker at the foot of the bed calling my mom's name. The rug by the front door along with the rugs in the kitchen are all removed so that the walker does not get caught on them. Laid out across the living room table are more pill bottles than I have ever seen at once. A daily schedule typed out stating which pill to take, how many times a day, at what times, and how many of those pills to take at once. A notepad to be written in for each time my mom takes a pill. Blanks left to be filled out with information including what time the pill was taken, which pill she took, how many of the pills she took, and the initials of who gave her the pills. 6 vitamins to be taken every morning with breakfast, a nausea pill to be taken twice a day with lunch and dinner, a very powerful steroid with a strict fifteen-day schedule to be taken at exact times each day to slowly ease her body away from needing it, and a pain med to be taken only every six hours when needed. Such a precise schedule that was so crucial to make sure my mom could have the smoothest recovery and avoid any other difficulties and concerns.

Next to the guest bed on the floor lay a small inflatable bed for none other than yours truly. Every night I had to sleep on the floor incase anything was wrong or bothering my mom. Every time she woke up in the middle of the night in pain, or just to go to the bathroom I had to be there every step of the way. 6:00 am when the alarm went off for her steroid I was there to wake her up and give it to her and late at night when she needed it again. Each morning when she would wake up for breakfast I was there to make it for her. Lunch time, there I was again making her the meal of her choice. Pushing her daily to eat, drink, and most importantly stay awake. She struggles to keep her eyes open and to sit up. All she wants to do is lay down and sleep more, but she knows that it is not an option as much as she fights for it. The look in her eye of determination and the change in the tone of her voice meant everything.

I became known as the drug dealer around my house hold. Due to the fact that I was the one in charge of my mom's medicine and keeping up

with the strict schedule. There is nothing harder for me than seeing my mom in the conditions she was in. Never had it crossed my mind that I would be the one pushing my mom to stay awake, eat food, stay hydrated or make her meals. That is what my mom has always done for me. As hard as it was for me, I knew that it was harder for her. I knew that I needed to stay strong and take authority over the situation. When you are little you are taught to not talk back to your parents or yell at them. Well, I had a complete role change in which I had to yell back at my mom in order to get her to sit up and stay awake. My sisters and I would even pull out the good cop bad cop scheme to see if it would help.

There is no worse feeling than yelling at your mother, especially knowing how much pain she is in, yet how badly she wants it. The look of determination she would get in her eyes because she was aware of what needed to be done. That look is what assured me that what I was doing was okay. That as much as she hated me for pushing her and yelling at her, it was all going to be worthwhile. The change in her tone of her voice set the mood. As easy as it could have been for me to just give up and back down on her, it was the look on her face and her tone that was deep down telling me to keep going. Until you hit certain points when you just had to know that is enough whether she wanted to stop or not. And don't get me wrong, she did everything she could to lay back in bed and try to sleep, and what kept me sane during it all was her sense of humor and the minor jokes she would crack and I'd just know, that is my mom still in there fighting her way through this every step of the way.

It was a little past midnight and I was leaving for college at 4:00 a.m. Because of the surgery my mom was unable to bring me to college, see my dorm, help me move in, and drop me off. It was heart breaking to me, but I knew going into her surgery that she would not be able to and it was what had to be done. I crack open my mom's bedroom door to see the nightstand's light peak through a little as I find my mom sitting up in bed. I go and lay down next to her and wrap my arms around her as I hug her and pull her closer. I bury my head into her as I cry and explain how I do not want to leave or go to college. She holds me tighter and begins to sooth and comfort me by rubbing my back and assuring me that everything is going to be okay. She made me smile and laugh comparing me to my sisters. She reassured me that I'm only three hours away and she would come visit me as soon as she was able to. The roles had switched again that night as my mom was the one comforting, encouraging, and staying strong for me. As the tears slid down her cheeks she said to me, I am not crying because I am sad, but because of how excited I am for you and the amount of fun you are about to have.